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REFORM, RECONSTRUCTION, REACTION: THE SOCIAL VISION OF SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIANISM c. 1830-c. 1930

by PROFESSOR S. J. BROWN

IN 1929, after many years of consultation and compromise, the two largest Presbyterian denominations in Scotland — the established Church of Scotland and the voluntary United Free Church — were united. The Union was an impressive achievement, marking the end of the bitter divisions of eighteenth and nineteenth century Scottish Presbyterianism. In particular, it represented the healing of the wounds of the Disruption of 1843, when the national Church of Scotland had been broken up as a result of conflicts between Church and State over patronage and the Church's spiritual independence. With the Union of 1929, the leaders of Scottish Presbyterianism, and especially John White of Glasgow's Barony Church, succeeded not only in uniting the major Presbyterian Churches, but also in establishing a cooperative relationship between Church and State. The Church of Scotland, it seemed, was again in a position to assert national leadership.

There was, however, another story of Scottish Presbyterianism in the 1920s, which until recently has been largely neglected. This involved the disillusionment, even hostility, which many Scots felt toward the Presbyterian Churches. For the large majority of Scottish people, the 1920s were a time not of healing and unity, but rather of high unemployment, widespread material deprivation and profound social inequality. The promises of a new, more egalitarian social order that was to follow upon the ordeal of the First World War had proved empty. As the leaders of the Presbyterian Churches concentrated on the final stages of their ecclesiastical union, they appeared largely unconcerned with the post-war social suffering. Church leaders raised no prophetic voice against social injustice and offered little by way of social vision.

Recently, several scholars have explored Church and society in nineteenth and early twentieth century Scotland from new

perspectives, giving less attention to the ecclesiastical politics of the Union movement, and more attention to the social teachings of the Churches. Professor Donald C. Smith, in *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest: Social Criticism in the Scottish Church 1830-1945*, argues that during the early nineteenth century the Scottish Presbyterian Churches were dominated by the propertied elites and used their influence to uphold privilege and existing power structures. Later in the nineteenth century, however, Smith discerns the emergence of a 'prophetic voice' of social criticism in the Scottish Churches, which helped to restore their independence and social leadership. Smith's favourable view of the Churches' recovery of social vision, however, is not shared by other writers. In *The Transforming of the Kirk: Victorian Scotland's Religious Revolution*, Professor A. C. Cheyne perceives progress in the social teachings of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches during the later nineteenth century, but also observes that the Churches' voice of social criticism grew silent after the First World War. For Professor T. C. Smout, in *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*, the Presbyterian Churches, though well-intentioned, failed to respond adequately to the mass deprivation, inequality and social alienation that accompanied Victorian Scotland's industrial expansion, in large part because the Churches failed to adapt their social vision, developed to meet the needs of small, agrarian parish communities, to the social structures of mature industrial society. Callum Brown's *Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* argues that the failure of Scottish Christianity to develop a social vision for mature industrial society meant that the emerging labouring orders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries turned to alternative, secular social visions, most notably socialist materialism.¹

This essay will explore the changing social vision of Scottish Presbyterianism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It will begin with the Evangelical Liberalism that

¹ A. C. Cheyne, *The Transforming of the Kirk: Victorian Scotland's Religious Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1983), 110-56; D. C. Smith, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest: Social Criticism in the Scottish Church 1830-1945* (New York, 1987), passim.; T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950* (Glasgow, 1986), 181-208; C. Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London, 1987), 169-208; see also D. J. Withrington's seminal article 'The Churches in Scotland, c. 1870-c.1900: Towards a New Social Conscience?' *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, xix (1977), 155-68.

predominated during most of the nineteenth century — with its emphasis on personal conversion, economic individualism, and the ideal parish community. It will then consider the 'Christian Socialist' revival in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Scottish Presbyterianism, as a group of Scottish Presbyterians embraced a new social vision, based less upon the reform and conversion of individuals, and more upon the reform of social structures. Their movement reached its high point amid the devastating ordeal of the First World War, which many viewed as a damning indictment of pre-war capitalism and a clear summons to work for the thorough reconstruction of the social order. Finally, the essay will consider the collapse of the Presbyterian Churches' commitment to Christian social reform after the War, and the withdrawal of the Church leaders from expression of concern for social justice into a preoccupation with ecclesiastical organisation and ecclesiastical authority. This failure of Presbyterian social witness, it will be argued, was not an inevitable response to post-war disillusionment and social change. Rather, it resulted in large part from decisions made by Presbyterian Church leaders after the War to silence the Church's voice of social criticism in order to preserve existing membership and ensure the success of the Church Union proceedings. To a large extent, the Union of the Presbyterian Churches in 1929 was achieved at the cost of their social influence.

Mid-Victorian Evangelical Liberalism

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the social vision of Scottish Presbyterianism was dominated by the ideas of the Evangelical preacher and political economist, Thomas Chalmers. During the 1820s and 1830s, Chalmers had organised and led a national movement to revive the social authority of the established Church of Scotland in response to the social dislocations of early industrialisation. For Chalmers, the new economic forces, while contributing to material progress, were also destroying the traditional communal structures of Scotland. The emerging industrial society, with its unbridled competition, radical individualism, and *laissez faire* policies, was bringing prosperity only for the few, and profound material and spiritual deprivation for the many. The only way to

preserve the social fabric against the impact of industrialism was to restore the waning authority of the Church of Scotland over poor relief, education, and social morals. In particular, he advocated strengthening the parish system through a radical increase in the number of parish churches and schools, until the entire Scottish population had been organised into small, largely self-contained parochial communities of 2,000 or less inhabitants, in which communal values could be nurtured. The aim of this Evangelical 'Church Extension' campaign was revive the ideal of Scotland as a godly commonwealth.²

In order to achieve the godly commonwealth, Chalmers and the Evangelical Church Extensionists in the Church of Scotland needed the cooperation of the British Parliamentary State. The Church Extensionists needed State grants to endow new parish churches and schools, and they needed Parliament to reform the law of church patronage (in order to increase the popular voice in the selection of ministers). But State cooperation in these areas was not forthcoming in the 1830s and 1840s. The British State was increasingly embracing the liberal values of economic individualism and *laissez faire*. Both Whig and Tory politicians perceived in Chalmers' godly commonwealth ideal a threat to parliamentary authority and to the civil liberties of Dissenters and Roman Catholics. Parliament declined to support the Church Extension campaign, while the civil law courts declared the Church's 'Veto Act' for the reform of patronage to be illegal. For many politicians, the established Church was little more than a department of state. When Chalmers and most Evangelical Church Extensionists refused to acquiesce in such a subordinate status for their Church, the resulting conflict culminated in the Disruption of the national Church of Scotland in 1843.³

Organised religion in Scotland was fragmented after 1843. There was a system of free trade in religion, as largely middle-class Evangelical congregations sought out new members in the growing towns and cities with an aggressive entrepreneurship, reflecting the liberal ethos of the free market economy.

² S. J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford, 1982), esp. 144-51, 220-50.

³ *Ibid.*, 250-81, 296-337.

The years from 1843 to the early 1870s were the high tide of Evangelical voluntarism. Among the competing denominations, three Presbyterian bodies were predominant — the established Church of Scotland, the Free Church which had been formed in 1843, and the United Presbyterian Church which had been created in 1847 through the union of the largest eighteenth century secession Churches. Between them, they represented over 80 per cent of Scotland's church-going population.⁴

The three Victorian Presbyterian Churches had essentially the same theology, church government, and social ideals. In all three Churches, moreover, there was concern about the pervasive poverty in industrialising Scotland, and a commitment to improving the condition of the poor. A mid-Victorian Presbyterian social ideal can be identified, defined by certain fundamental assumptions. First, the Presbyterian Churches directed their efforts primarily to the personal conversion and moral improvement of individuals. The salvation of the immortal soul was infinitely more important than mere temporal justice or well-being. Social arrangements in this world ultimately had little significance when set against the background of eternity. 'Life here is but a span', the Church of Scotland clergyman, John Caird, proclaimed in 1855, 'Life hereafter is *forever*. A lifetime of solitude, hardship, penury, were all too slight a price to pay, if need be, for an eternity of bliss.' In preaching, emphasis was placed on Christ's atonement for the sins of the individual. Mid-Victorian Evangelicals, to be sure, recognised the existence of social evils, such as intemperance, illiteracy, and profound material deprivation, which could become obstacles to the gospel, and they made strenuous efforts to eliminate these obstacles through acts of private philanthropy. But they also believed that the gospel alone was sufficient to break through the bleakest of social environments and penetrate the most hardened characters with saving grace. To doubt the efficacy of the gospel message to reach every individual was to question the omnipotence of

⁴ Brown, *Social History of Religion in Scotland*, *op. cit.*, 60-77, 135-52; W. G. Blaikie, *An Autobiography: Recollections of a Busy Life*, 2nd edn., (London, 1901), 111.

God. Priority, then, was given to preaching the gospel of personal salvation.⁵

Secondly, most mid-Victorian Presbyterians accepted the teachings of political economy. They believed that society, like the natural world, was governed by inexorable natural laws, which might appear harsh to limited human understanding, but which were part of a divine order which it was presumptuous and ultimately self-destructive for men to challenge. The market-place was self-regulating, and functioned best with a minimum of State interference. The Malthusian law of population decreed the inevitability of competition for scarce resources. Such competition, however, had its beneficial aspect, forcing individuals to exert themselves and thus to contribute to social progress. Competition also strengthened individual self-discipline and restraint, preparing persons to repent and receive the gospel offer of saving grace. Indeed, the Evangelical emphasis on individual conversion mirrored the political economist's emphasis on individual exertion through competition in the self-regulating market-place — in what, it seemed, could only be providential design. 'It must undoubtedly be the design of our gracious God', John Caird asserted in 1855, 'that all this toil for the supply of our physical necessities — this incessant occupation amid the things that perish, shall be no obstruction, but rather a help, to our spiritual life'.⁶ Competition, to be sure, also meant there would be inequality and poverty, but had not Christ himself taught that the poor would always be with us?

Thirdly, it was recognised that the competitive market-place of political economy did not ensure the welfare of everyone, and did not fulfill the basic human need for communal life.

⁵ R. Buchanan, *The Waste Places of our Great Cities; or the Voice of God in the Cholera* (Glasgow, 1853), 14-38; T. Guthrie, *The Poor, and How to Help Them* (London, 1868), 6-11; J. M. E. Ross, *William Ross of Cowcaddens* (London, 1905), 103-10; W. G. Enright, 'Preaching and Theology in the Nineteenth Century' (Edinburgh Univ. Ph.D. Thesis, 1968), 212-24; J. Caird, *Religion in Common Life* (Edinburgh, 1855), 7; J. Pirie, *The Lapsed: With Suggestions as to the Best Means of Raising Them* (Edinburgh, 1871), 21.

⁶ Caird, *Religion in Common Life*, *op. cit.*, 9. For the relationship of nineteenth century Evangelicalism and political economy, see especially B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1988), esp. 36-70, and A. M. C. Waterman, 'The Ideological Alliance of Political Economy and Christian Ideology', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34 (1983), 231-44.

The communal ideal of Thomas Chalmers — based on the attempt to restore the pre-industrial rural parish community in the industrialising towns and cities — continued to exert a powerful influence on Presbyterian Churchmen throughout the century. Presbyterian Evangelicals entered destitute urban districts and made heroic efforts to create Christian communities on what was termed 'Dr Chalmers's territorial system'. Such community-building operations involved the appointment of urban missionaries, the recruitment of lay volunteers for house-to-house visiting, and the building of churches and schools. Although the emphasis was on the gospel of individual salvation, home mission workers did not neglect the material needs of the poor, and they encouraged communities to seek out and help those in need. They insisted, however, that such charity had to be purely voluntary and restricted to those individuals who were unable to work.⁷ No one, they believed, had a natural right to sustenance as a matter of justice. Most mid-Victorian Presbyterians, moreover, divided the poor into two classes — the 'worthy' poor, hopeful cases who warranted alms, and the 'idle' or 'dissolute' poor, who had so succumbed to worldly temptations that Christian charity would be largely wasted on them, and might well encourage them in vice to the further danger of their immortal souls.⁸

Through their Evangelical paternalism, mid-Victorian Presbyterians did much to aid the inevitable social wreckage of industrial capitalism — working to create Christian communities in the urban slums on Chalmers's territorial model, seeking to elevate the moral character of the labouring poor. One such minister was William Ross of the Free Church who in 1883 left an idyllic church living in his native Highlands for the destitute Cowcaddens district of Glasgow. There he mapped out a 'territory', enlisted voluntary lay visitors to carry the gospel regularly into every household, organised evening

⁷ Brown, *Thomas Chalmers*, *op. cit.*, esp. 375-79; N. L. Walker, *Robert Buchanan* (London, 1877), 300-38; Cheyne, *The Transforming of the Kirk*, *op. cit.*, 112-18; N. Macleod, *How Can We Best Relieve our Deserving Poor?* (London, 1867); J. Pirie, *The Lapsed*, *op. cit.*, 21; A. R. Bonar, *The Church of Scotland's Duty to the Masses* (Edinburgh, 1857).

⁸ Macleod, *How Can We Best Relieve Our Deserving Poor?* *op. cit.*

prayer meetings, and endeavoured to sustain a working-class congregation. Ross's professed aims were both to convert sinners and to improve social conditions in Cowcaddens by increasing the independent spirit of the inhabitants — aims which he viewed as inseparable. Lasting social improvement, he was certain, would not be achieved by poor relief, sanitary reform, factory legislation, or any other form of State intervention. Rather, it would come only by converting and reforming sinful individuals through the power of the gospel, so that they might form closely-knit parish communities.⁹ The growth of Christian communal spirit was based upon individual conversion, just as the growth of the economy was a function of individual exertion in the competitive market-place.

Christian Social Progressivism

By the mid-1880s, however, the social ideas of Evangelical clergymen like William Ross were appearing out-of-date, as the complexities of mature industrial society raised doubts about the teachings of political economy. The 1880s were a decade of radical change in social attitudes throughout Britain. The mature industrial society of the late nineteenth century was characterised by the dominance of heavy industry, large combines, advanced urbanisation, and a well-defined class structure. It was also characterised by great disparities of wealth, with unprecedented material prosperity for the middle and upper classes, and profound deprivation for a large part of the working class. Grey urban slums and the stunted bodies of the poor huddled in the shadow of monumental industrial achievements.

To confront these disparities, radical reformers founded socialist organisations, such as the Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation, or the Scottish Labour Party. Socialist activists organised unskilled and semi-skilled labour, and the 'New Unionism' transformed labour politics. The combination of an awakened social conscience and fear of working-class militancy spurred enquiries into social conditions. William Booth's seminal investigations into social conditions in Lon-

⁹ Ross, *William Ross*, *op. cit.*, 104-87.

don, published in 1890, revealed the brutal realities of urban slums and chronic unemployment, which the often heroic efforts of Victorian Evangelical philanthropists had failed to alleviate. Politicians from across the political spectrum began looking to collective action as the only response to the cancer of mass deprivation and misery. At the local level, municipal governments began assuming control over such services as gas, water and tramways. At the national level, social liberals pressed for legislation in order to improve the health and vigour of the British people. In England, there was a revival of the Christian Socialist idealism of J. M. Ludlow and F. D. Maurice, reflected now in such organisations as the Guild of St Matthew (1877), the Christian Socialist Society (1886), and the Christian Social Union (1889).¹⁰ Some enthusiasts, like the Glasgow artist, J. Bruce Glasier, embraced socialism as a new religion — one promising that out of the undeserved suffering of millions of labouring poor throughout history, the millennium of fellowship and equality would finally be achieved.¹¹

Within the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, a group of clergy and laity turned from the Evangelical individualism of the previous generation to embrace much of the new social thought. These Christian social progressives were men of vision, in touch with the intellectual currents of the day as well as with the ugly realities of poverty. A recent historian of religion in Scotland estimates that there were less than a hundred social progressives holding office in the pre-War Scottish Churches; they were, however, well placed in college and university chairs, and in influential urban churches.¹² While not an organised ecclesiastical party, they were linked by certain shared social assumptions and attitudes. Few of them had read widely in Marxist or other secular social theories: their socialism was essentially ethical, and often based on extensive practical experience with poverty.

¹⁰ P. d'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914* (Princeton, 1968); E. R. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. 1-13; D. O. Wagner, *The Church of England and Social Reform Since 1854* (New York, 1930), esp. chh. 5-6; K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England* (London, 1963), 269-82.

¹¹ R. St. John Conway and J. Bruce Glasier, *The Religion of Socialism: Two Aspects* (Glasgow, [1890]), 10-16; S. Yeo, 'A New Life: the Religion of Socialism in Britain', *History Workshop*, no. 4 (Autumn, 1977), 5-56.

¹² Brown, *Social History of Religion in Scotland*, *op. cit.*, 191.

The Christian progressives shared a new appreciation for the role of social environment in shaping individual character. They recognised that overcrowding, poor diet, and the drabness of slum life could ensure moral and spiritual defeat for all but the strongest or most fortunate, and that individual vices, especially intemperance, were frequently more the effects than the causes of poverty. This recognition represented a radical break from the fundamental belief of the mid-Victorian Evangelicals — that you must first reform the character of individuals before you could hope to reform society. Some even questioned the power of the gospel alone to reach individuals sunk in the urban underworld of poverty and despair. In 1888, Donald Macleod, the Church of Scotland minister of the Park Church, Glasgow, directed public attention to the close correlation in Glasgow between the number of people living in inadequate housing and the number of non-church-goers. The home mission, he concluded, must include not only sermons and tracts for the rescue of individual sinners, but also political action for the reform of social structures — for ‘Christ cared for the body as well as for the soul’. The following year, the established Presbytery of Glasgow appointed a commission to enquire into the housing of the poor, which issued a comprehensive and influential report.¹³ In 1891, the General Assembly of the established Church appointed a commission, under the convenership of John Marshall Lang, to enquire into the ‘Religious Condition of the People’. After several years of social investigation, the commission reported that social deprivation was often the decisive factor in non-church-going, and that tens of thousands of slum dwellers were being lost to Christianity. Thus there was a pressing Christian need not only to proclaim the gospel but also ‘to realise a more equitable distribution of wealth’ through ‘combined action along the whole line of social life’.¹⁴ Sensitivity to the effects of environment was reinforced by developments in biblical scholarship, with new attention directed to the Old Testament prophets and their

¹³ D. Macleod, *Non-Church-Going and the Housing of the Poor* (Edinburgh, 1888), 13.

¹⁴ *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1896, pp. 808, 814.

imperatives of corporate redemption and social justice. In preaching, there was a shift in emphasis from the atonement and individual salvation, to the incarnation and Christ's message to suffering humanity in this world.¹⁵

Late Victorian Christian progressives condemned the profound inequalities in competitive industrial society. Many now rejected the fundamental assumption of the political economists — that society is governed by inexorable natural laws which decreed that competition and inequality were necessary to the economic well-being of society. The 'economic laws', Christian progressives became convinced, were not inexorable laws of nature, but simply parts of an economic system created by fallible and self-interested human beings. Social inequality was not divinely ordained, but was a human corruption of God's plan. The opulence of the propertied elites was viewed less as contributing to economic progress, and more as the result of exploitation and jungle law. The rich, Professor George Adam Smith of the Free Church proclaimed in 1896, were in many cases feeding on the poor, by selling them alcohol, acting as slum landlords or paying inadequate wages: 'the truth is clear that many families of the middle class, and some of the very wealthiest of the land, are nourished by the waste of the lives of the poor'.¹⁶

Presbyterian progressives reproached the Church for having accepted, even sanctioned, social inequality. For too long it had been content merely to give alms to the poor, rather than to demand a redistribution of wealth so that the labouring orders might have the opportunity to reach their full human potential. It had admonished people on the margins of society to deference, while it defended the rights and privileges of property. The Free Church minister, David M. Ross, observed in 1885 that the Church had 'seen the injustice and oppression under which the less fortunate classes have laboured, and preached to them nothing but the duty of contentment and submission to superiors'. 'The sin of the

¹⁵ See, for example, J. Caird, 'Corporate Immortality', in *Scotch Sermons* (Edinburgh, 1880), 1-17; C. M. Gibb, 'Attitudes of the Prophets to Social Questions', *Forward* (Glasgow), 14 August 1909; Smith, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest*, *op. cit.*, 254-6; Enright, 'Preaching and Theology in the Nineteenth Century', *op. cit.*, 355-83.

¹⁶ Cited in Smith, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest*, *op. cit.*, 272.

Church', wrote the Church of Scotland minister, A. Scott Matheson, in 1893, 'has been to care more for distributing charity than for distributing wealth'.¹⁷

Underlying this condemnation of inequality was an organic view of society which rejected the radical individualism, the 'economic man' of the political economists. Christian progressives insisted that society was more than the sum of its individual parts, more than a collection of individuals pursuing selfish interests and leaving it to the market-place to safeguard the general welfare. Humankind, they argued, had evolved to a level of consciousness above the mere survival of the fittest, and people could at last recognise their essential interdependence. 'The idea of organism', A. Scott Matheson maintained in 1893, 'every part for the whole and the whole for every part, affords the key to many of our enigmas, and pervades the simple and sublime morality of Jesus Christ'.¹⁸ Clearly, it was the mission of the Church, with its doctrine of the Kingdom of God, to give a Christian direction to the evolving social consciousness. This included the recognition that the problems of mature industrial society demanded collectivist solutions, which would best be achieved by the joint action of an interventionist State and a socially committed Church. Christians should cease looking backwards to the small, self-contained parish communities of Scotland's agrarian past, but should take as their sphere of action the complex whole of urban-industrial society. The laws of political economy were not inexorable; economic activity could be directed by a modern Christian commonwealth informed by the biblical teachings and faith in God. The task of Christianity, insisted David M. Ross in 1885, 'is not merely to save individuals, but to regenerate society. One of the most characteristic phrases in Christ's teaching was the Kingdom of God.' Writing in 1902, John Marshall Lang maintained that the purpose of the Church was 'to represent more fully to mankind the social life that is proper to it'.¹⁹

¹⁷ D. M. Ross, 'Christianity and Socialism', in A. B. Bruce, *et al.*, *Christianity and Social Life: A Course of Lectures* (Edinburgh, 1885), 84; A. Scott Matheson, *The Church and Social Problems* (Edinburgh, 1893), 58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹ D. M. Ross, 'Christianity and Socialism', *op. cit.*, 76; J. Marshall Lang, *The Church and Its Social Mission* (Edinburgh, 1902), 343.

In 1908, the British economy was plunged into a major industrial depression. There was widespread unemployment, especially among the heavy industries in the West of Scotland, and socialists such as the Glasgow school teacher, John Maclean, made unemployment the basis of a devastating indictment of capitalism.²⁰ Witnessing the agonies of mass unemployment, many Presbyterian progressives became convinced that it was a moral imperative to support the Labour movement. They increasingly viewed unemployment as an unavoidable evil in capitalism, predestining a significant proportion of the workforce to chronic misery through no fault of their own. This structural unemployment made a mockery of the traditional Evangelical emphasis on individual moral reform through Christian influence. What, social progressives asked, could be the Christian morality of reforming one individual and helping him find employment and respectability, when this might mean taking the position from another, and driving that person, and perhaps his family as well, into poverty and non-church-attendance?²¹ Capitalism, it seemed, could never be more than the survival of the fittest; the laws of political economy were intolerable according to the moral standards of Christianity. Indeed, in view of the recurrent industrial crises and growing working-class alienation, capitalism appeared to be approaching final collapse. William Muir, United Free Church minister in Glasgow and later convener of his Church's Social Problems Committee, argued in 1910 that the Church was facing a decisive moment. A second Reformation was at hand. The Church, Muir contended, must either cast its influence on the side of the labouring masses, or repeat the error made by Martin Luther in 1525, when he had thrown his influence against the revolt of the German peasants. But should the Church again turn against the masses, Muir

²⁰ J. M. Smith, 'Commonsense Thought and Working class Consciousness: Some Aspects of the Glasgow and Liverpool Labour Movements in the Early Years of the Twentieth Century' (Edinburgh Univ. Ph.D. Thesis, 1981), 320-30; *Forward* (Glasgow), 23rd May, 4th July, 12th, 19th September, 3rd, 17th, 31st October, 7th, 14th, 21st November 1908.

²¹ D. Wilson, 'Conditions of Employment', in *The Churches' Task in Social Reform: Report of the United Free Church Congress on Social Problems* (Edinburgh, 1912), 22-9; C. M. Gibb, 'Unemployment: A Study for Bible Readers', *Forward*, 24th July, 7th August 1909.

prophesized, labour would 'avenge its wrongs on the Church by becoming the ally of the materialist and infidel', and the triumph of social democracy would mean the end of Christian civilisation.²²

After 1908, the growing commitment to realising the Kingdom of God found expression in another movement: that for reuniting the branches of Scottish Presbyterianism into a national Church with the resources and efficiency needed to reassert its authority over Scotland's mature industrial society. During the 1870s and 1880s, the Free Church and United Presbyterian Church had been allied in a campaign to disestablish the Church of Scotland. The campaign, however, failed to secure its aim and after 1886 support for disestablishment waned. During the 1890s, Presbyterian progressives turned from their denominational rivalries, and placed new emphasis on the need for Christian unity in confronting growing irreligion and the social problems of mature industrial society. In 1900, the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church combined to form the United Free Church. Legal difficulties developed when a section of the Free Church refused to enter the union of 1900 and claimed all the property of the Free Church, but Parliament intervened to resolve the dispute. In 1908, formal talks were opened between the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland. This was followed in 1909 by the beginning of a continuing conference between the two Churches intended to identify and remove obstacles to union.²³ It seemed that the unity of the national Church of Scotland would be restored — in time for it to assume leadership over the collectivist social reform movements which were gathering more and more support. The godly commonwealth ideal of Chalmers would be revived, now in the modern form of Christian Socialism.

Christian progressives worked to ensure that the Church union movement took on board the priorities of social reform. In 1910, the General Assembly of the United Free Church appointed a permanent Social Problems Committee with

²² W. Muir, *Christianity and Labour* (London, 1910), 33, 265.

²³ R. Sjolinder, *Presbyterian Reunion in Scotland 1907-1921: Its Background and Development* (Stockholm, 1962), 83-162; A. Muir, *John White* (London, 1958), 83-154; J. R. Fleming, *The Story of Church Union in Scotland* (London, 1929), 41-62.

authority to establish cooperative relations with the Labour movement.²⁴ Within the General Assembly of the established Church, the Life and Work Committee and the Social Work Committee engaged in social investigations and pressed for greater social equality. Between 1910 and 1914, both Churches sponsored a number of conferences at the local and national levels, which brought Church and Labour leaders together in an effort to define common objectives and coordinate action on such issues as unemployment and housing.²⁵ The West of Scotland socialist newspaper, *Forward*, published articles by the Presbyterian ministers, Colin Gibb and F. C. Young, on the Old Testament prophets, the Kingdom of God, and Jesus as 'the Champion of the Oppressed'.²⁶ A major concern of the Christian social progressives was to ensure that the proposed Church union would not simply be a means of providing enhanced status and material security for the clergy, but that the united Church would be a force for significant social reform. This theme was developed in a series of lectures delivered in the summer of 1914 by the Church of Scotland minister and 'crofters' champion', Malcolm MacCallum, of the Highland parish of Muckairn. According to MacCallum, Jesus was a 'revolutionary', whose 'work was social and political, not individualistic or ecclesiastical'. 'The main function', MacCallum proclaimed, 'of the Church, the body of Believers in Christ, is to inspire and direct political action towards the eradication of social injustice, and the stamping out of impious national ambitions, rivalries and hatreds.' The mission of the reunited Church must be to turn the nation away from the 'corporate sins' of industrial capitalism and toward the justice of the Kingdom of God.²⁷

It was now seen as the Church's duty to Christianise socialism, much as the earlier generation of Evangelicals had worked to Christianise political economy. Once reunited, the national

²⁴ Smith, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest*, *op. cit.*, 340-52.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 353-6; *Forward*, 5, 19th February 1910, 15th, 22nd April, 10th June, 18th November, 2nd, 23rd December 1911, 4th May 1912.

²⁶ See, for example, *Forward*, 3rd October, 7th November 1908, 6th, 20th, 27th February, 13th March, 10th, 24th July, 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th August, 4th, 18th September 1909, 2nd, 9th April, 7th May 1910, 21st, 28th December 1912.

²⁷ M. MacCallum, *Religion as Social Justice* (Glasgow, 1915), 133, 135.

Church would work for an inclusive Christian Socialism that would transcend Marxist atheism, materialism and class conflict, and ensure the harmonious evolution of the whole of Scottish society. 'The gospel of Christ', argued the Glasgow minister, Colin Gibb, at the United Free Church General Assembly of 1910, 'is not satisfied with the production of one isolated saint here and there: it aims at a kingdom, at a new earth.'²⁸ Not all Scottish Presbyterians, to be sure, accepted the collectivist ideas, and such figures as Dr H. M. B. Reid, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow University and Masonic Senior Grand Chaplain for Scotland, championed the connection of Christianity, private property and economic individualism.²⁹ But their ideas seemed out of touch with the emerging Edwardian social welfare state and the new theological emphasis on the Kingdom of God.

In the late summer of 1914, Scotland was brought into the First World War. On the whole, Scottish Presbyterians accepted Britain's entry into the war as just and necessary, and ministers assured their congregations of God's favour. Yet, as the months and years passed, and the casualties at the front and deprivation at home increased, many were gripped by fatalism and religious doubt.³⁰ The death toll at the front was unprecedented, while at home, war-time deprivation, including deteriorating housing and rising rents, brought social unrest, particularly in the industrial West of Scotland. In late April 1916, nationalists rose in Ireland for an independent republic, and much of central Dublin was destroyed in the fighting before the 'Easter rising' was suppressed. In the West of Scotland, some Scottish socialists and nationalists expressed sympathy for the defeated Irish rebels.³¹ What, Scottish Christians asked, did these events signify? Why did God allow the war to continue — to weaken the social fabric at home and to grind down the values of Christian civilisation through seemingly endless slaughter?

²⁸ *Forward*, 13th August 1910.

²⁹ *Forward*, 24th, 31st December 1910, 26th April 1913; H. M. B. Reid, *The Cleavage in the Scottish Church* (Glasgow, 1914), esp. 7-9.

³⁰ P. C. Matheson, 'Scottish War Sermons 1914-1919', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, xvii (1972), 203-13.

³¹ [T. Johnston], 'Connolly and the Dublin Insurrection', *Forward*, 6th May 1916; [Anon.], 'Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week?' *Scottish Review*, 39 (Autumn, 1916), 354-74.

In May 1916, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed a special Commission on the War in Relation to its Spiritual, Moral and Social Issues. The first report of the Commission, presented in May 1917, was pervaded by the ideas of pre-war Christian Socialism. The War, the report maintained, was a 'visitation at once judicial and remedial'. It was judicial, in that it was a damning indictment of the existing civilisation based on selfish individualism, survival of the fittest, inequality and materialism: 'our modern civilisation, apart from the support of Christianity, is bankrupt'. But it was also remedial — a summons to corporate repentance and corporate reform, including 'new conceptions of national and social Christianity'.

It is for the Church, inspired by the vision of the Kingdom of God, to use the occasion provided in the providence of God for the purpose of securing a drastic and permanent amelioration of social conditions. 'Never again' must be her watchword as she contemplates the chaos of pre-war conditions . . .³²

During the following months, the Church of Scotland's Commission on the War worked closely with a similar new war-time Committee of the United Free Church to prepare for post-war reconstruction. The Churches also endeavoured to cooperate with the war-time Coalition Government's Committee on Reconstruction, which was formed in 1917 to plan for fundamental social change after the War — especially in housing and industrial organisation. Leading experts in social work and social policy were invited to prepare papers on such issues as housing, poor relief, industrial unrest and rural depopulation — which were published in 1918 under the title, *Social Evils and Problems*.³³ The Churches sponsored conferences on housing problems in December 1917 and on industrial reconstruction in March and in December 1918, in order to consider the Government Committee's proposals. They welcomed the

³² *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1917, pp. 726, 741, 746, 753.

³³ W. P. Paterson and D. Watson (eds.), *Social Evils and Problems* (Edinburgh, 1918), 26-7.

Government's promises to build tens of thousands of new houses and to create councils of workers and employers to manage industries.³⁴ 'Our aim,' the Church of Scotland Commission on the War declared in its report for 1918, 'must be under God to make Scotland a Christian country in fact as well as in name, to realise the vision of our forefathers, and to build in Scottish fields a true city of God.'³⁵

In November 1918, the Armistice silenced the guns on the Western Front. With the victorious end of the War, the moment had come to commence the work of Christian social Reconstruction. After months of preparation in the synods and presbyteries, the two Churches formally launched a National Mission of Rededication in the spring of 1919 with the central theme of 'the supremacy of Christ in all spheres'. Sermons and addresses throughout Scotland announced 'the call of God to the Church and Nation' and on 'Rededication Sunday' in April 1919, congregations stood and pledged themselves to work for the new Christian society.³⁶ 'The War,' David Watson, a leading member of the Church of Scotland's Commission on the War, proclaimed in a volume published early in 1919, 'has shattered our old civilisation and discredited the foundation of self-interest on which it rested. We are seeking to rebuild a new and better world on a surer foundation.'³⁷ At their first post-war meetings, in May 1919, the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church focused on the work of Reconstruction. The report of the Church of Scotland's Commission on the War for 1919 pressed the point that most members believed the Church must take an active part in building the new order. According to a survey conducted by the Commission, Church members were distressed over 'the failure of the Church to identify herself closely with the efforts and aspirations of the masses' and believed that 'the Church should take a much stronger stand than she has done in the matter of Social and Industrial problems'.³⁸ The Assembly of 1919 transformed the Commis-

³⁴ *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1918, pp. 619-25; *Ibid.*, 1919, pp. 631-5.

³⁵ *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1918, p. 629.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1919, pp. 631-5; Smith, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest*, *op. cit.*, 360.

³⁷ D. Watson, *The Social Expression of Christianity* (London, 1919), 177.

sion on the War into a permanent Church and Nation Committee, which was to work to ensure the Church's leadership in the new social order. In his address closing the Church of Scotland Assembly of 1919, the Moderator, Professor W. P. Paterson of Edinburgh University, summoned the nation to 'covenant together' for the 'welfare of the social organism'. Now was the time, he declared, to bury forever 'the dogma of the economists, that every man ought intelligently to pursue his obvious private interests'. Out of the horrendous sacrifices of the War had come the 'revival of the older and worthier conception that the laws of God demand to be positively applied in all spheres, including the political and economic'. Church and State, now advancing together, would build the godly commonwealth in Scotland. But in the same speech, Paterson issued a warning: if all this proved to be empty rhetoric, 'if the hopes of a new era have been raised only to be dashed', the effects on the Scottish Church and nation would be disastrous.³⁹

The Failure of Social Vision

As the Scottish Presbyterian Churches were committing themselves to Reconstruction, however, Reconstruction as a Government policy was falling victim to the changed political and economic circumstances of post-war Britain. The Franchise Act of 1918 had brought political democracy, but war-time solidarity broke down and politics became increasingly divided along the lines of social class. The Liberal party, which had dominated Scottish politics before the War, was split into warring factions, and the Labour party emerged as a powerful independent force. Responding to the events of the Russian Revolution, the propertied classes in Scotland were gripped by the 'red scare' — with tensions heightened by the Forty-Hours Strike in January 1919 and by John Maclean's efforts to rouse support for a Scottish Socialist Republic. The Troubles in Ireland, with open warfare between the nationalists and un-

³⁸ *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1919, pp. 645, 660; Muir, *John White*, *op. cit.*, 182-3; *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland*, 1919, pp. 244-7.

³⁹ W. P. Paterson, *Recent History and the Call to Brotherhood: Address Delivered at the Close of the General Assembly, May 29, 1919* (Edinburgh, 1919), 9, 25, 32.

ionist forces, raised fears that the violence would spread to the West of Scotland. In the general election of November 1918, the Conservative-dominated Coalition Government had won a substantial majority, and early in 1919, under pressure from its supporters, the Government moved to dismantle war-time economic controls and withdraw its plans for Reconstruction. Not Reconstruction, but the rapid restoration of pre-war economic conditions, became the Government's prescription for Britain's post-war ills.⁴⁰ State-directed Reconstruction, Government advisers now argued, was 'alien to the British genius'. The return to 'private enterprise' was both the key to revived prosperity and the proper response to socialist agitators.⁴¹

The Scottish Presbyterian Churches were confronted with a dilemma. General Assemblies and Church conferences had committed the Churches to Reconstruction, and Church leaders had promised to work with the State to create a new social and economic order. But now the Coalition Government was withdrawing from its war-time commitments and reviving those very 'dogmas' of political economy which Church leaders and Assembly committees had recently condemned with such prophetic vehemence. How should Church leaders respond? For the Churches to stand firm behind their professed commitment to social Reconstruction would mean setting themselves against the Government and moving toward alignment with the Labour opposition. But this would alienate the predominantly middle-class Church membership. It would also antagonise the Government — at a time when the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church were reviving the Church union movement and would soon require parliamentary sanction for changes in the established Church's constitution. Labour partisanship might threaten the success of the Church union movement, and thus end the hopes of restoring the Church's social leadership. Further, was it right in principle for the Churches to take sides in the

⁴⁰ R. H. Tawney, 'The Abolition of Economic Controls, 1918-1921', *Economic History Review*, xiii (1943), 1-30; P. Abrams, 'The Failure of Social Reform, 1918-1920', *Past and Present*, 24 (1963), 43-64; K. O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922* (Oxford, 1979), 88-105.

⁴¹ Tawney, 'The Abolition of Economic Controls', *op. cit.*, 14.

polarised, emotive politics of post-war Scotland? After the trauma of the War, should not the Church's mission be one of healing divisions, by standing above the political fray and preaching the pure gospel?

In early 1920, a sub-committee of the Church and Nation Committee — the sub-committee on Social and Industrial Life — confronted the issue when it prepared a policy statement on 'Christianity and Industrial Problems' for the General Assembly. The draft statement was discussed at a meeting on 20th January 1920. The co-convenor of the sub-committee, W. P. Paterson, found the draft 'very inadequate' in view of the pledges the Church had made to building a new society. And yet, Paterson confessed to his diary that evening, 'the difficulty is that we either make a statement of platitudes which is futile, or take a Christian socialist line which is dangerous and disruptive'. The change in the Government's position on Reconstruction meant that social progressives like Paterson now risked being divisive if they remained true to their promises. In the event, the sub-committee decided not to risk danger and disruption. As presented to the General Assembly in May 1920, the statement on 'Christianity and Industrial Problems' confined itself to platitudes. 'It is not for the Church', it argued, 'to advocate particular schemes of industrial organisation, still less to identify herself with any party.'⁴² Within a year, Paterson resigned as co-convenor of the sub-committee on Social and Industrial Life.

Late in 1920, the brief post-war economic boom ended, and Scottish society entered a prolonged slough of industrial stagnation, high unemployment, and declining wages.⁴³ Now came the turn of the United Free Church to confront the collapse of Reconstruction. At the General Assembly of the United Free Church in May 1921, the convenor of the Social Problems Committee, J. D. Robertson, presented a report which condemned the revival of *laissez faire* capitalism. 'The time for the exploitation of the masses of labour,' Robertson proclaimed, 'had passed, and the time had come when human

⁴² *The Diaries of W. P. Paterson*, ed., C. L. Rawlins (Edinburgh, 1987), 266; *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1920, p. 525.

⁴³ C. Harvie, *No God and Precious Few Heroes: Scotland 1914-1980* (London, 1981), 39-48.

beings must no longer be treated as machines or . . . be kept in grinding poverty or on the border line of starvation.' The Church, Robertson argued, should open discussions with the Labour Party in the struggle for a new Christian social order based on cooperation and equality. The report was immediately challenged from the floor. Speakers argued that it was the Church's duty to support 'the powers that be' (the Coalition Government) and that the Church should return to its former respect for 'economic science'. The Rev. David MacQueen of Glasgow objected to what he saw was the report's bias to the labouring poor: 'the Church of Christ', he asserted, 'did not stand for one section of the population, for the gospel was for all the people, for the rich as well as the poor.' By a show of hands, the offending portions of the report were rejected. According to George Reith, the principal clerk of the Assembly, this vote marked the decisive defeat for the 'social service enthusiasts' and the return of the United Free Church to its proper business of preaching the gospel to sinful individuals and watching over their morals.⁴⁴ At the next year's Assembly, in May 1922, Robertson returned as Social Problems Committee convener and delivered an impassioned plea on behalf of the unemployed and social justice. 'The Committee', he asserted, 'had no party; but they were sure of this, that they must have something better than this tremendous competition between one class and another.' After the debate, the Moderator announced that Robertson had resigned as convener of the Social Problems Committee and would be leaving for 'a distant country'.⁴⁵ Robertson died a few years later in China.

The Christian social progressives in both Churches had been defeated, and their leaders now passed from the scene. William Muir, convener of the Social Problems Committee of the United Free Church for many years, died in 1920. John Kelman, minister of Free St George's, Edinburgh, and a social activist, emigrated to the United States in 1919. The young

⁴⁴ *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland*, 1921, pp. 150-59; G. M. Reith, *Reminiscences of the United Free Church General Assembly (1900-1929)* (Edinburgh, 1933), 235.

⁴⁵ *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland*, 1922, pp. 314-21.

John Baillie, a talented theologian, also emigrated to the United States that year. James Barr, of the United Free Church, gave up his Glasgow pastorate in 1920 and was subsequently elected as Labour M.P. The United Free Church social progressive, Colin Gibb, demitted his Glasgow church pastorate in 1925. Malcolm MacCallum of Muckairn was an unsuccessful Labour parliamentary candidate in 1920 and retired from the parish ministry in 1921. W. P. Paterson withdrew from active involvement in Church affairs after 1920. The remaining social progressives were marginalised. General Assembly committees increasingly confined their social interest to matters of personal morality — to the need to abolish gambling, enforce temperance, impose sexual purity, and apply censorship to the new cinema. A new set of post-war leaders emerged — men who had demonstrated patriotic zeal during the War and now had 'sound' views concerning private property, competition, and the 'economic laws'.

These were men whom the Government would trust with the direction of a united national Church of Scotland. By 1920, the Church union proceedings had reached the point where Government support was vital. Within the United Free Church, there remained a strong voluntary element, which objected in principle to State establishments and endowments. In order to remove the opposition of the voluntaries, leaders of the union movement needed parliamentary legislation to guarantee the Church of Scotland independence in spiritual matters, and to end the system of State endowments (while compensating the Church with a capital payment). In the years after the War, Church leaders had entered into a close working relationship with the Conservative Party leader, the Scots Presbyterian. Andrew Bonar Law, and the Government agreed to introduce the necessary legislation of 1921 and 1925, which guaranteed the Church's spiritual independence and financial status.⁴⁶

By the mid 1920s, the dominant leader in both the Church of Scotland and the Church union movement was John White, minister of the Barony church in Glasgow. A fiercely patriotic

⁴⁶ Sjolinder, *Presbyterian Reunion in Scotland*, *op. cit.*, 309-58; Muir, *John White*, *op. cit.*, 198-213.

preacher during the War, White had served for over a year as chaplain on the Western Front. He was a professed Conservative who moved with ease among the social and political elites and enjoyed manoeuvring the corridors of power. Although one of the organisers of the National Mission of Rededication, he had not been overly disappointed with its collapse. 'Among the working classes,' he later observed, 'there were Church members who took some interest in the *social* side of the Mission, but the Church cannot thirl itself to the economic creed or political theories of one section of the community.'⁴⁷ He did not appear disturbed by the possibility that the Church might now be 'thirling' itself to the 'economic creed and political theories' of the most powerful section of the community — the upper and middle classes whose interests were being served by the Conservative Government.

Although the Presbyterian Churches had ceased to criticise the existing economic and social structures after 1922, their leaders continued to claim responsibility for the national welfare. White in particular advocated the principle of national religion, and viewed Church union as a means of re-establishing the social authority of the Church of Scotland.⁴⁸ With the high unemployment and industrial stagnation of the 1920s, White and other Presbyterian leaders could not pretend that all was well with Scotland. But after aligning themselves with the Conservative Government, the Presbyterian Churches would no longer attribute social suffering to *laissez faire* capitalism. They had to find an explanation that would not involve criticism of the existing economic system. Their search led to one of the darker episodes in modern Scottish history.

At the general election of November 1922, the Labour Party won a dramatic victory in the West of Scotland, sweeping ten out of fifteen Glasgow-area seats. The new Labour MPs left for London on a special train amid scenes of millenarian enthusiasm in Glasgow, with the crowd singing the 'Covenanting' 23rd and the 124th psalms.⁴⁹ At Westminster, the 'Clydesiders',

⁴⁷ Muir, *John White*, *op. cit.*, 186.

⁴⁸ For example, White's speech on Union, *Glasgow Herald*, 26th May 1928.

⁴⁹ Smout, *Century of the Scottish People*, *op. cit.*, 271.

including the Scoto-Irish Catholic, John Wheatley, the agnostic, James Maxton, and the Jew, Emanuel Shinwell, were relentless in denouncing the evils of unemployment and inadequate housing. Labour voiced the concerns and championed the issues which the Presbyterian Churches were now seeking to ignore. The Labour victory had been greatly assisted by the support of the large Roman Catholic community in the West of Scotland, most of whom were descendants of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants. From the 1880s until the First World War, this community had supported the Liberal Party — the party of Irish home rule. But by 1922, following the creation of the Irish Free State, the Scoto-Irish community had shifted its allegiance to Labour.⁵⁰

A few months after the election of 1922, a special committee of the Church of Scotland General Assembly issued a report on the 'menace' of 'Irish Immigration' in response to earlier overtures coming from subordinate Church courts in the West of Scotland. The report, prepared by the Rev. Duncan Cameron of Kilsyth, opened with expressions of 'alarm and anxiety' over the Irish Catholic 'incursion' into Scotland — an incursion that was destroying 'the unity and homogeneity of the Scottish people'.⁵¹ This incursion had a 'very sinister meaning for the future of our race'. It was not only that Irish Catholics took employment from native Scots and lowered the moral character of the population by their 'intemperance' and 'improvidence'.⁵² Rather, their very presence was divisive, and probably accounted for the withdrawal of God's favour from Scotland, as reflected in the post-war industrial stagnation and unrest. Irish Catholic immigrants were 'an alien people', no matter how long they may have lived in the country; 'fusion of the Scottish and Irish races in Scotland . . . will remain an impossibility'. Racial mixing, moreover, was against God's will. 'God placed the people of this world in families, and history, which is the narrative of His providence, tells us that when kingdoms are divided against themselves they cannot stand.'⁵³ The Irish

⁵⁰ Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, *op. cit.*, 163; C. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism* (London, 1977), 43; Smout, *Century of the Scottish People*, *op. cit.*, 270-1.

⁵¹ *Reports on the Schemes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, 1923, p. 750-762, 751.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 756, 758.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 761.

Catholic 'menace' would have to be confronted: 'they cannot afford to lose time in taking whatever steps may be necessary to secure this just and patriotic end'.⁵⁴

The report was introduced at the General Assembly of 1923 by the Rev. William Main of Edinburgh, who called the Assembly's attention to the recent election of the Clydeside Labour MPs. 'They had been elected members of Parliament', Main asserted, 'by the fact that they had this enormous Irish Catholic population in these areas. Hence the type of men sent from these areas to Parliament, bringing scandal and disgrace into the House of Commons.' In supporting the report, the elder, William Black, argued that Glasgow and the West were 'so permeated by the increasing numbers of foreign nationalities' that elections there no longer 'represented the opinion of the Scottish people'. The Rev. J. MacLagan noted that many trade unions were 'in the hands of men who were not Scottish' and suggested that employers remedy this by restricting their employment to those of the Scottish race.⁵⁵ The Assembly received the report with thanks, and instructed the Church and Nation Committee, now under the convenership of John White and Lord Sands, to take action.

Following the Church of Scotland initiative, the United Free Church joined the campaign against the Scoto-Irish Catholics. In 1924, its Christian Life and Social Problems Committee called for action against the 'menace' of Irish Immigration, which was 'lowering the character of the Scottish people'.⁵⁶ The two Churches formed a Joint Committee to coordinate the campaign. Church committees prepared reports and compiled statistics on anti-social behaviour among Scoto-Irish Catholics, while the Joint Committee worked to convince the Conservative Government not only to halt further Irish immigration, but also to deport large numbers of Irish-born Catholics, including those receiving poor relief, in State-supported hospitals, or with criminal records. The campaign was blatant in its racism. In a letter to Sir John Gilmore, the Scottish

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 756.

⁵⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 30th May 1923.

⁵⁶ *Reports to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland*, 1924, no. xxiii, pp. 11-12.

Secretary, in 1926 (which was published in the Church and Nation report of that year), John White referred to the Irish as an 'inferior race' and the Scots as a 'superior race'; the Irish were 'immigrants whose presence tends to lower the social conditions and to undermine that spirit of independence which has so long been a characteristic of the Scottish people'.⁵⁷ 'The Church of Scotland', the Church and Nation Committee asserted in their report of 1927, '... has clearly an obligation to defend Scottish nationality such as no other institution or organisation has'.⁵⁸

Such language was far from the inclusive spirit of the Kingdom of God, far from the ideals of Christian fellowship and equality expressed by pre-War Christian social progressives. Presbyterian leaders such as John White, William Main and Duncan Cameron were seeking to make the Church into the champion of a racial nationalism, and to unite the social classes against a minority labelled as outside the covenant. They sought to make Scoto-Irish Catholics the scapegoats for the social and economic ills of the 1920s. Their campaign involved not only a corruption of Christian teaching, but also a flawed view of history. The Irish were no more an 'alien' race in Scotland, than were the Gaels of the Highlands and Islands. Peoples had navigated the narrow North Channel separating Scotland and Ireland for centuries, intermingling and intermarrying. Irish immigration, moreover, had declined to negligible proportions by the 1920s, as Scottish industry stagnated.⁵⁹

In May 1926, the increasing social polarisation culminated in the General Strike, as workers throughout Britain struck in support of the coal miners, locked out for refusing to accept reductions in their wages. While Church leaders in England, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke out for both reconciliation and social justice, Scottish Presbyterian Church leaders showed a clear bias in favour of the mine owners and the Government. When the General Strike was broken after nine days, James Harvey, the United Free Church Moderator,

⁵⁷ *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1926, p. 619.

⁵⁸ *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland*, 1927, p. 1220.

⁵⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 26th March, 15th April 1929.

described it as 'a victory for God'.⁶⁰ For those who recalled the Churches' promises of a new social order to follow the ordeal of the War, the Churches' campaign against Scoto-Irish Catholics and bias against the miners in 1926 seemed little less than a betrayal.⁶¹ It is not surprising that many socially concerned men and women on the left, such as the writers, Hugh MacDiarmid or Lewis Grassic Gibbon, lost faith in the Presbyterian Churches.⁶² It is not surprising that so many within the working class viewed the Church as a class-based institution, concerned primarily with upholding the rights of private property and preserving the existing social hierarchy. Nor is it surprising that within the United Free Church, some remaining social progressives, such as the clergyman and Labour MP, James Barr, or the lay-elder and Labour MP, Thomas Johnston, joined with the die-hard voluntaries to form a small, but determined opposition to the approaching Church union. While not opposed in principle to Church union, they did oppose the type of Church union being worked out by White and his associates, which they feared would stifle the Church's independent voice of social criticism.⁶³

In 1929, the Union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church was finally completed, and the unity of the national Presbyterian Church was largely restored. The ceremony in Edinburgh was an impressive one, and John White was the man of the hour. Willingness to withdraw the Churches from their war-time commitments to Reconstruction and readiness to cooperate with the post-war Conservative Governments had helped to bring the union movement to a successful conclusion. Now, it was believed, the united Church would revive its national leadership. One of White's early acts as leader of the united Church was to revive Thomas Chalmers's Church Extension campaign of the 1830s and to seek, in the midst of the world-wide depression of the 1930s, to restore the

⁶⁰ *Scotsman*, 19th May 1926; *Glasgow Herald*, 19th May 1926.

⁶¹ See, for example, the letter from the Edinburgh Labour MP, T. Drummond Shiels, in the *Scotsman*, 18th May 1926.

⁶² In the second novel of his *A Scots Quair* trilogy, *Cloud Howe* (1933), Lewis Grassic Gibbon captures the sense of disillusionment with the national Church in post-war Scottish society. See also Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (London, 1934), 313-27.

⁶³ J. Barr, *The United Free Church of Scotland* (London, 1934), 109-10, 173-4, 218, 284.

Church's parochial supervision over the Scottish nation. But neither the Union of 1929 nor the Church Extension campaign of the 1930s brought a revival of the Church's national leadership. In a sense, the Union of 1929 had been purchased at too high a cost. In concentrating for so long on the pragmatic politics of ecclesiastical union, Church leaders had lost grip with the chief end of the Church — as witness to the coming Kingdom of God. They had become concerned primarily with reestablishing the authority of the national Church, and with suppressing or eliminating those, like the Scoto-Irish Catholics, who would not accept that authority. Ambition for ecclesiastical authority had overshadowed the Church's duty to work for social justice for all people, including those outside the Presbyterian communion.⁶⁴ The reunited Church of Scotland in the 1930s was not the national Church led by Chalmers during the 1830s, which had made bold efforts to restore a sense of Christian commonwealth. Nor was it the Church envisaged by the social progressives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. New leaders, to be sure, emerged in the 1930s to revive the Church of Scotland's social witness — including John Baillie, who returned to Scotland from America in 1934, and George Macleod, who founded the Iona Community in 1938. But great damage had been done to the Church's social influence after the War, and the task of repairing that damage would be tremendous.

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⁶⁴ For a discussion of some long-term effects of this emphasis on ecclesiastical structures and authority, see J. Harvey, *Bridging the Gap: Has the Church Failed the Poor?* (Edinburgh, 1987), 11-38.

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